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Chairman: Mr. MARTYNOV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Martynov (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 67 (continued)

QUESTION OF ANTARCTICA: GENERAL DEBATE, CONSIDERATION OF AND ACTION ON DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

The CHAIRMAN: The first speaker for this afternoon's meeting is the representative of Australia, who will speak on behalf of the States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty.

Mr. WILENSKI (Australia): As you have just indicated, Mr. Chairman, I am speaking today to address the Committee on behalf of the States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty. This is a joint statement of the united position of both the Consultative Parties and the non-consultative parties to the Antarctic Treaty, which collectively represent a majority of humankind and about a quarter of the membership of the United Nations. The parties will not be making separate statements.

Last year, when for the first time I addressed the Committee on this subject, I noted that my research into the history of the item showed that it had become a meaningless annual ritual since its initiators had broken with consensus handling of the item in 1985. This continues to be the case. For their part, the Treaty Parties sincerely wish to promote a productive dialogue and to further enhance the existing long-standing co-operative relationship between the United Nations and the Antarctic Treaty systems. However, this can only be on the basis of mutual respect and recognition of the reality that Antarctica does not exist in a legal vacuum but has a special legal and political status which has developed from and around the Antarctic Treaty. This system is in full conformity with international law and is dedicated to furthering the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations. We hope that in recognition of these facts, the initiators of this item will return to a consensus approach in the future.

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

The Antarctic Treaty is a remarkable instrument of international co-operation which, in its thirtieth year, continues to make an important contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security, to the advancement of scientific knowledge and to global and regional environmental awareness and protection.

I would remind members that the major features of the Antarctic Treaty include its openness to accession by any State; the stipulation that Antarctica should for ever be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, and not become the scene or object of discord; the prohibition on nuclear explosions and on the disposal of nuclear waste, and on any measures of a military nature, including the testing of weapons or the conduct of military manoeuvres - indeed, Antarctica is an area free of nuclear weapons and is the first entirely non-militarized continent - and the removal of the potential for political and sovereignty disputes by the unique accommodation of claimant and non-claimant positions, which allows co-operation on scientific and other matters to proceed.

Other important features of the Treaty are the guarantees of freedom of scientific research throughout Antarctica and the promotion of exchanges of scientific information and personnel; and the establishment of a comprehensive system of on-site inspection to promote the objectives, and ensure the observance, of the Treaty.

I wish to underline the Treaty system's twofold contribution to the protection of the global environment: first, by means of the instruments and measures it has developed to protect the local Antarctic environment; secondly, by the knowledge obtained by the Treaty Parties through their scientific research activity, which is freely shared with the international community.

The work of the Antarctic Treaty system in the conservation and environmental field is impressive and widely acknowledged. Some 60 per cent of the measures adopted to date under the Treaty apply to the environment. Many of these measures

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

and the conservation concepts embodied in the separate instruments associated with the Treaty dealing with the conservation of Antarctic marine living resources represent pioneering contributions in the field of environmental management generally.

Principal Treaty measures in this regard relate to the prohibition of nuclear explosions and the disposal of nuclear waste; controls on the use of radioisotopes; the Antarctic protected areas system; environmental impact assessment procedures; the code of conduct for Antarctic expeditions and station activities; guidelines on the effects of Antarctic tourism and non-governmental expeditions; waste management and disposal arrangements; oil contamination and marine pollution prevention and response action obligations; siting of stations; and agreed measures for the conservation of Antarctic fauna and flora.

However, the Treaty Parties are not content just to rest on their record of achievement. They are conscious of the need to update and improve upon the existing system where necessary. To this end, the eleventh Antarctic Treaty Special Consultative Meeting, which is dedicated to the Antarctic environment, has just commenced at Viña del Mar in Chile. This meeting is exploring and discussing proposals relating to the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment and its dependent and associated ecosystems. An important question being addressed is the desirability of the nations active in Antarctica negotiating a new legal instrument to provide more effective and better co-ordinated protection in order to ensure that human activity does not have adverse environmental impacts or compromise the scientific, aesthetic or wilderness values of the region. The precise terms of reference are contained in the report of the fifteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, which has been made available to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The whole question of comprehensive protection is complex,

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

but the task has begun in earnest in Chile, and the usual arrangements will be made to keep the Secretary-General informed of developments.

The Antarctic Treaty Parties have long recognized the value of preserving the Antarctic environment, not only because of Antarctica's intrinsic, unique qualities, but also because of its interaction with the global environment. The Antarctic region has a high negative radiation budget, and so acts as one of the Earth's "refrigerators". Any changes in the budget will have global consequences on atmospheric and oceanic circulation. Conditions beneath the ice sheet and the surrounding sea ice promote the concentration of cold nutrient-rich bottom water that drains northward. Polar seas play an especially important role in the exchange of carbon dioxide between ocean and atmosphere.

Scientific research conducted by the Treaty Parties in Antarctica has played a vital role in understanding the nature of our planet and how it works. The ozone hole phenomenon was discovered by the scientists of the Antarctic Treaty Parties, and monitoring and meteorological data from Antarctica are making an indispensable contribution to the global effort to predict and understand climate change. A detailed record of past climate change and atmospheric chemistry extending over hundreds of millenia is preserved within the Antarctic ice sheet and in the sediments of the Southern Ocean and the Antarctic continent. High latitudes offer unique opportunities for monitoring indicators of climate change, because it is predicted to be the greatest there, owing to the sensitivity of plant communities to temperature change and the possibility of measuring ice sheet-sea level variation. These are some of the reasons why Antarctic science and environmental protection are important to us all. They underline the need for the Antarctic Treaty system to be supported, not criticized.

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

Consistent with their dedication to global science and environmental management, Treaty Parties will be participating constructively in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which is to be held in Brazil in 1992. The results of the scientific research on the role that Antarctica and the Southern Ocean play in interactive physical, chemical and biological processes that regulate the Earth system are readily available. The outcome of the 1991 Antarctic Science Conference of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) may also provide a timely input. The Treaty Parties are currently considering a request by the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development for information in relation to the study requested by the Preparatory Committee at its first session in Nairobi on "Pollution-related problems and status of living marine resources in all marine regions, including specific seas and polar regions, as appropriate". In the context of the Conference, however, as is reflected in the reports of the working groups at the Nairobi preparatory session, Antarctica may not be singled out as the one area of the world for which specific reports are produced or in respect of which a specific focus is placed by the Secretary-General in the various reports requested of him. May I interpolate, personally, in that regard that only a few minutes ago I saw the new operative paragraph 4 of draft resolution A/C.1/45/L.63, introduced into the text without any advance notification, consultation or attempt at consensus, which seeks to override the carefully built consensus on which the Conference preparations have, up until now, been developed by the General Assembly.

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

The Antarctic Treaty is an open Treaty which encourages interchange and dialogue with the international community. This is illustrated by the organization of public symposia, the attendance of specialized agencies and other international organizations at Antarctic meetings, and the huge volume of information available through scientific publications, national contact points of the Treaty Parties, international data centres and through the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The following organizations have attended formal Treaty system meetings: the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR); the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR); the International Maritime Organization (IMO); the World Meteorological Organizaton (WMO); the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO); the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC); the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO); the International Oceanographic Commission (IOC); the Scientific Committee on Oceanographic Research (SCOR) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

Many of these bodies will also be attending the environment meeting to be held in Chile, where they will be joined by the Scientific Committee on the Protection of the Environment (SCOPE), the International Program for the Biosphere and the Geosphere (IGBP) and the European Community, which also participates in CCAMLR.

In the past 12 months open Antarctic symposia have been held in Paris, New York, Hobart, Siena, Oslo, Canberra, Santiago and Brussels.

There is thus, unlike in the case of many other regional bodies, no barrier to receipt of information or participation by any country with a serious interest in Antarctica. We encourage such interest and would urge the international community to make greater use of the information that is available.

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

Unfortunately, draft resolution A/C.1/45/L.63 is, as it stands, unacceptable to the Antarctic Treaty Parties in a number of respects. It goes beyond past resolutions on this subject and has been presented late in the session, allowing little time or opportunity for the negotiation of a return to consensus. This prompts me to repeat what I said in my opening remarks about this item having become an annual ritual and one which does not contribute to a useful dialogue on the practical ongoing management of activity in Antarctica through the Antarctic Treaty system.

There is one aspect of draft resolution A/C.1/45/L.63 which the Treaty Parties wish to single out for comment. It is the request to the Secretary-General to undertake a study on the establishment of a United Nations-sponsored station in Antarctica.

Leaving aside for the present the legal, financial and logistical issues which the proposal presents and the question whether it is consistent with the Charter, let us instead examine the rationale for the proposal. On the face of it, the idea that further scientific research might be undertaken in Antarctica may have a certain appeal. But what sort of research? Treaty Parties are already fully engaged in conducting extensive research throughout the continent in co-operation with expert scientific bodies and international organizations. Moreover, the results of this research are shared fully with the international community. Co-operation between the Treaty system and the World Meteorological Organization, which is mentioned in the draft resolution, dates from the earliest days of the Treaty.

Moreover, it is well known that scientific research in Antarctica has been conducted for more than 30 years with the active participation of scientific organizations in such a manner as to enable those organizations to fulfil their

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

objectives. Those are the only organizations that truly have a scientific interest in Antarctic research.

Since no scientific rationale has been advanced for the proposal, it is our conclusion that the proposal has a political purpose. It is based on a misunderstanding of the way the Treaty operates and foreshadows something which would have no practical effect whatever. The United Nations can ill afford to squander scarce resources on such a proposal.

According to paragraph 8 of draft resolution A/C.1/45/L.63/Rev.1, the Secretary-General would be requested to submit to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session a report on

"the state of the environment in Antarctica and its impact on the global system".

Because we became aware of this proposal only this morning, we have been unable to discuss it with fellow Treaty Parties and so I cannot provide the Committee with their views at this stage. In any case, we are uncertain as to precisely what is sought or why. We would note, however, that any attempt to prepare a comprehensive report on these matters would require significant resources. We would be grateful to have, as soon as possible, the Secretariat's views on the implications of this proposal. I would remind the Committee that I referred earlier in my statement to the volume of scientific and environmental information available to the international community.

The Antarctic Treaty system continues to be strong, dynamic, flexible and effective in managing activity in Antarctica and to enjoy the support of a diverse and formidable range of countries with differing political, economic and social complexions. These include all those geographically close to Antarctica or nations claiming sovereignty there, the most populous nations on earth, developed and developing, aligned and non-aligned, large and small countries, all nuclear-weapon

(Mr. Wilenski, Australia)

States and all permanent members of the Security Council. Participation continues to increase. Switzerland has recently acceded to the Antarctic Treaty and, since Monday, 19 November, the number of Consultative Parties has grown by two, namely, Ecuador and the Netherlands.

The 30 per cent growth in the number of Contracting Parties to the Antarctic Treaty since this item was inscribed on the agenda of the General Assembly in 1983 is proof of the strength and dynamism of the Treaty system. We reiterate our invitation to those who criticize the Treaty, instead to demonstrate their real concern about the future of Antarctica by joining their efforts with ours within the Treaty system.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh): I should like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's supreme confidence in Ambassador Rana's able stewardship of our deliberations.

Even though Antarctica may be remote, largely uninhabited and undeniably inhospitable, there is not the slightest doubt that the lives of all living beings are affected by this vast land mass. It makes a significant contribution towards the maintenance of the delicate balance in the global ecosystem. It helps preserve and protect our environment - a matter of increasing concern. It assists the propagation of knowledge by providing a most suitable venue for scientific research. It is of immense strategic importance. It is fragile and therefore vulnerable. Should the global community display a burgeoning interest in Antarctica, it would indeed be most appropriate and welcome.

It is well known that in Antarctica the atmosphere, the oceans and the ice sheet interact with one another, creating a profound impact on the climate and the weather of a large portion of our planet. There are ample reasons for apprehension that unfettered mineral exploration entailing the use of mechanical tools could

(Mr. Chowdhury, Bangladesh)

release vast amounts of energy into the atmosphere, resulting in the melting of ice and a consequent rise in sea levels. For low-lying countries like Bangladesh, and others in a comparable milieu, this would, as the representative of Fiji pointed out today, have disastrous implications.

(Mr. Chowdhury, Bangladesh)

But this is not the only reason why we have an interest in the Antarctic. There are certain principles that we fervently believe in. This vast continent must be seen as nature's boon to mankind. In fact, the framers of the Antarctic Treaty, which is the object of such attention today, envisioned just that. The Treaty provisions make that quite clear when in its preambular paragraphs, as noted earlier by the Ambassador of Australia, it states:

"... It is in the interest of all mankind that Antarctica shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and shall not become the scene of international discord". (United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 402, No. 5778, p. 71, preamble)

And that is not all. The framers had hoped that the fruits to be derived from co-operation would contribute to greater global understanding, for the Treaty provisions go on to express the fond hope that:

"a treaty ensuring the use of Antarctica for peaceful purposes only and the continuance of international harmony in Antarctica will further the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations". (ibid.)

Unfortunately, not only has such harmony not been realized, but the implicit commitment to the values of the United Nations has been sadly spurned. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, for instance, is not invited to Treaty meetings, despite the urgings of a broad section of global public opinion. The Treaty itself, notwithstanding assertions to the contrary, is not perceived by many as an open one.

There are good reasons for this. A majority of States are precluded from becoming Consultative Parties because of the requirements of financial and technical wherewithal and know-how. The concept of non-exclusivity is severely damaged by the obvious class distinction created by the hierarchical differences between Consultative and non-Consultative members. While the Treaty may have

(Mr. Chowdhury, Bangladesh)

worked well so far, it contains germs of discord that must at some point transform into a conflictual situation.

Because the Antarctic concerns us all, all must be allowed to participate in any decision-making with regard to it. This is simple but incontrovertible logic. Any régime to be established for the protection and conservation of the Antarctic environment must be negotiated with the participation of the whole of the international community. The United Nations would be the most fitting context. There is a need to ban prospective mining in and around the continent. Such activities would be certain to attract military attention. As the flag followed trade in the colonial past, the gun may tend to follow the mining shovel in contemporary times. In any case, all activities should not only be directed exclusively towards peaceful scientific investigations but should also take place within the framework of a common agreement and under stringent environmental safeguards.

It is our belief that those aims could be furthered by the active involvement of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as well as of Member States. There is much the United Nations could do. It could, for instance, as has been proposed in draft resolution A/C.1/45/L.63, which is before us, sponsor the establishment of a station in Antarctica with a view to promoting co-ordinated international co-operation in scientific research. The sponsors of the draft resolution believe that all mankind would surely benefit from this.

What I have talked of falls within the practicable. This is not just the picture of an ideal scenario painted with our aspirations. This is not to argue - and indeed, it would be naive to do so - that the awesome, pristine beauty of the Antarctic should for ever remain untouched. It is natural that man should want to derive some benefit from it, but all must be allowed to decide on how. As

(Mr. Chowdhury, Bangladesh)

our sense of common human needs grows keener and our sense of justice wider, Antarctica will come to be recognized by all as the common heritage of mankind. Let us anticipate that inevitability and shape our conduct accordingly.

Mr. KIBIDI NGOVUKA (Zaire) (interpretation from French): The delegation of Zaire is speaking today in the general discussion on Antarctica to demonstrate its interest in this important question, which is of concern to the international community.

This question was first inscribed on the agenda of First Committee at its thirty-eighth session, and since then the discussions that have taken place have enabled the whole of the international community to reach a better understanding of the nature of the problems of Antarctica, both in their links with the environment and as they relate to the international legal order.

Scientific knowledge of Antarctica has enabled all mankind to be informed about the importance of that continent in the preservation of our fragile ecosystem, the conservation of resources and the protection of the environment, as well as the role it plays in the world's climate. International conferences on environment questions that are held from time to time give our leaders a better appreciation of what is at stake scientifically, legally and technologically in the problems of Antarctica.

The delegation of Zaire would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Secretary-General for the report (A/45/459) he has submitted, which gives an outstanding summary of the problems of Antarctica and indicates the concerns of the international community with regard to this issue.

The basic premise that Antarctica is the common heritage of all mankind is enough to explain the major interest of the whole of the international community in this question. At the meeting of its Council of Ministers held at Addis Ababa in

(Mr. Kibidi Ngovuka, Zaire)

1985, the Organization of African Unity adopted a resolution in which Antarctica was proclaimed the common heritage of all mankind. In 1986 the Eighth Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Countries, held at Harare, also proclaimed Antarctica to be the common heritage of mankind. This demonstrates that that continent lies outside the jurisdiction of one country or group of countries and that any wish expressed by any country either for its annexation or its exclusive control by a group of countries is nothing but the expression of an outdated imperialism.

Zaire is a part of the third world that is cut off from the scientific activities concerning Antarctica. That fact, however, does not prevent us from having a positive over-all appreciation of the scientific activities being carried out by the signatories to the Antarctic Treaty. Zaire has never intended to challenge the basic merits of that Treaty, and we are pleased that it has established a system that for 31 years has frozen the claims to Antarctica and been able to preserve the demilitarized and denuclearized status of that continent.

In the past we have deplored the fact that that legal instrument had one essential flaw, namely, the fact that it is not universal. We deplore that again today. The Treaty is open only to some States that possess a very high scientific potential and significant financial means. As a result, we regret that accession to the Treaty is always on a selective, and therefore discriminatory and arbitrary, basis. Everything occurs within one group; its members do not communicate the results of their research to the United Nations and purely and simply ignore the authority of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Zaire delegation deplores such unorthodox practices and hopes that they will be remedied, for we regard them as a breach of international solidarity.

(Mr. Kibidi Ngovuka, Zaire)

Zaire expresses its concern at the minerals régime in Antarctica. We believe that no mining activity should occur in Antarctica, for such activities could have unforeseeable consequences for the continent's ecosystem. We are pleased by the reservations expressed by the Governments of France, Italy, Australia and Belgium with regard to that minerals régime.

(Mr. Kibidi Ngovuka, Zaire)

The status of a signatory State of the Antarctic Treaty conferred on South Africa continues to cause problems to our delegation. We know that constitutional developments are taking place but the legal bases of apartheid are still intact and as long as they have not been eliminated and as long as apartheid has not been eradicated Zaire will continue to give its moral support to the victims of apartheid.

As long as things remain as they are, Zaire will join the rest of the international community in asking for sanctions against South Africa and for it to be excluded from the Antarctic Treaty.

Zaire has no illusions, however, about the position of certain States on these questions but we do hope that exchanges of view taking place here will improve the climate of international co-operation.

Mr. POERNOMO (Indonesia): In recent years the question of Antarctica has become a matter of growing concern to the international community. Widely acclaimed as our last great frontier on earth, Antarctica's global significance has been generally recognized. Yet the functioning of the Antarctic Treaty system, and especially the role of the Consultative Parties, have given rise to serious misgivings and apprehension. This year's debate is taking place against the backdrop of an impending review of the Antarctic Treaty system during 1991, which offers an unprecedented opportunity for deep reflection and a sober analysis of both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Antarctic Treaty system.

Ever since the question of Antarctica was first included in the agenda of the First Committee, members have made unequivocal statements on its political, economic, juridical and scientific implications. The debates also evoked an appreciation of the Antarctic Treaty system as a unique mechanism for promoting and regulating scientific co-operation, the conservation of resources, and protection of the environment. Member States readily acknowledged the importance of

(Mr. Poernomo, Indonesia)

preserving the values of the Treaty, while protecting in perpetuity the larger interests of the international community. As a result, a consensus has emerged on the need to keep that continent free from strife and conflict over sovereignty claims, to preserve its denuclearized and demilitarized status, protect its fragile ecosystem from man-made hazards and ensure that its exploration and exploitation will be consistent with the principles and purposes set forth in the Charter.

Concurrently, however, our consideration of this item has also brought to the fore some stark realities of the Antarctic Treaty system, especially its inherent flaws and weaknesses. First, the Antarctic Treaty system is not accountable to the international community because of the secretive and exclusive nature of its functioning. Secondly, it is a selective and restrictive régime, with all the prerogatives being enjoyed solely by the Consultative Parties. Thirdly, it is discriminatory in its decision-making processes, which are confined to a few, privileged nations endowed with scientific and technological prowess. Fourthly, it has failed adequately to address and resolve the critical problems of environmental degradation and resource depletion in a manner equitable to the interests of the international community. Fifthly, it lacks a regulatory mechanism to enforce the rules relating to the environment and other pertinent aspects. In short, the major concerns of the non-signatories have continued to persist as perpetuation of the status quo has been sought. Divergent perspectives also remain regarding the extent and modalities of interaction between the Antarctic Treaty system and the United Nations, particularly in the context of ensuring the protection and utilization of Antarctica for the benefit of all mankind.

It has become increasingly apparent that the complex issues attendant upon Antarctica carry far-reaching implications beyond that region and impinge upon the fundamental interests of all nations. Severe ozone depletion over Antarctica has

(Mr. Poernomo, Indonesia)

become a matter of grave concern. Synthetic chemicals released into the air by human activities have reached the stratosphere, where they can break apart and destroy the ozone layer. These developments are viewed with alarm by the international scientific community as they pose unacceptable health hazards. There is a growing awareness that changes in the environment of Antarctica can have an unpredictable impact on the climate and ecological balance in other parts of the world. Compounding these problems are global warming, the "greenhouse effect", oil spills, marine pollution and the over-harvesting of marine resources - all of which affect the already delicate ecological balance on which life on this planet depends. These critical problems are not adequately addressed under the present régime.

The Antarctic Treaty system appears to be in disarray and turmoil as fundamental differences among the Consultative Parties have come to the surface in resolving these and a multitude of other issues. The most conspicuous, the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities, which was concluded in undue haste and secrecy, may already have become a dead letter as some of the signatories are having second thoughts about ratifying it. They have held the Convention to be incompatible with protection of the fragile Antarctic environment and have prohibited their nationals from prospecting for minerals. It is gratifying to note that these nations have instead endorsed the General Assembly's proposal to regard the Antarctic continent as a world park and for it to be the collective responsibility of all States to protect and preserve this pristine environment for posterity.

Given the present and anticipated importance of the scope and intensity of concern about Antarctica, there are indeed legitimate grounds for concern with regard to certain aspects and issues affecting this vast continent. As a nation in close proximity to Antarctica and as a archipelagic State, Indonesia cannot remain

(Mr. Poernomo, Indonesia)

indifferent to the developments taking place in Antarctica, which may have a direct bearing on its ecosystem, its coastlines, its cities, its industries and its agriculture.

In addressing the multiplicity of problems, it is incumbent on the Antarctic Treaty system to recognize the legitimacy of the international community's interests in and concerns about Antarctica. It is widely recognized that the problems of global atmospheric change and the increase in the "greenhouse effect" are global in scope and can only be resolved through co-operation. International responsibility for collecting data to monitor these problems can bring a consensus on how to proceed. The Antarctic Treaty system needs to be more fully opened up to participation by interested United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), relevant international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

(Mr. Poernomo, Indonesia)

The establishment of international scientific bases and research expeditions should replace the present sytem of national bases, with the attendant advantage of avoiding the proliferation of bases and duplication of scientific activities. My delegation also endorses the proposal that multidisciplinary programmes devoted to scientific research of global impact be undertaken on an international basis.

The world has undergone a radical transformation since the Antarctic Treaty system went into effect nearly three decades ago. These changes and realities must necessarily be reflected in the operation and functioning of the Treaty, if it is to be credible and effective. In the post-cold-war period of rapprochement and accommodation, of settling disputes through dialogue and negotiations, a new spirit of pragmatism should also inspire our efforts to resolve the question of Antarctica. In these endeavours we should take into account the existing realities and possibilities with a view to ensuring the dynamic adaptation of the Antarctic Treaty system and the removal of its deficiencies. Given the wide recognition of Antarctica's importance, the need for an internationally negotiated consensus under the auspices of the United Nations has become imperative.

My delegation believes that implementing draft resolution A/C.1/45/L.63 would enhance the credibility of the Treaty and the oft-repeated professions of its Parties that it is indeed an open and transparent system. So far the Consultative Parties have not shown themselves to be ready to address purposefully the misgivings and apprehensions of the non-Treaty nations. We therefore hope that in reviewing the Treaty next year they will seriously reassess their positions and contribute positively to strengthening the Treaty in terms that are acceptable to the comity of nations.

It is self-evident that flexibility on the part of the Consultative Parties is a prerequisite for international co-operation, thereby ensuring the future

(Mr. Poernomo, Indonesia)

stability of Antarctica. In the context of the rapidly evolving developments in that region, as well as policy changes by some of the Treaty signatories, my delegation hopes that we shall reach consensus on the draft resolution, consensus which has eluded us in the past. Consequently, in expressing our support for the draft resolution, we urge the Consultative Parties that have so far remained adamant to reconsider their positions and respond positively to the legitimate interests of the international community.

Mr. HERNANDEZ BASAVE (Mexico) (interpretation from Spanish): As humanity evolves it continually faces problems affecting everybody equally, and that inevitably fosters interdependence between all peoples. The accelerated industrial development of this century has presented us with a new challenge: the preservation of the environment.

The high priority that the international community is now giving to environmental problems clearly shows the importance of united efforts to preserve our environment. The United Nations has initiated concrete action in this connection by convening the Conference on Environment and Development, to be held in Brazil in 1992.

During the first phase of the work of the Preparatory Committee of that Conference there was greater recognition of the effect of the Antarctic continent on the global environment, and the need to take up the question at the Conference in 1992 was emphasized. At the same time, the proposal by some Parties to the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 to create a reserve or international natural park there and to declare a moratorium or total ban on mineral exploitation on the continent reflects the growing concern to preserve the Antarctic environment.

The meeting of the Parties to the Treaty which began yesterday in Santiago, Chile, will primarily discuss proposals concerning the moratorium. My delegation

(Mr. Hernandez Basave, Mexico)

believes that initiatives to protect the Antarctic environment should be considered by the whole international community and not by just a few countries. Therefore, Mexico supports calls for a constructive debate within the United Nations framework to identify the legal basis on which to give Antarctica a definitive, universal status, guaranteeing satisfactory protection and administration.

The détente in East-West relations has made possible, under the aegis of the United Nations, greater international co-operation in the settling of various problems. It is therefore more unacceptable than ever today that this international Organization should be excluded from decisions about the future of a continent of vital interest to the whole international community, because of its natural resources and its great influence on the planet's environment.

Negotiation within the United Nations of a definitive legal status for Antarctica would guarantee the creation of a system of international peace and security for that continent and the protection of its environment, while helping promote international co-operation to use the Antarctic continent exclusively for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all States equally.

Mr. ORDOÑEZ (Philippines): At this stage of our session we are addressing the vital issue of Antarctica. Antarctica is important to us for several reasons, which have become increasingly evident since we began debate on it in 1983.

At the inception of our debate it was pointed out that Antarctica, as a disarmament-related issue, was a prime example of how a major part of the planet could be kept free of conflict through a régime of co-operation. Now that the cold war is over, we can look back with satisfaction to a period when, despite ideological rivalries and persistent hotbeds of conflict, the Antarctic Treaty was negotiated and, in the following years, successfully respected and upheld.

(Mr. Ordoñez, Philippines)

In its Preamble, the Antarctic Treaty recognized that

"it is in the interest of all mankind that Antarctica shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and shall not become the scene or object of international discord". (United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 402, No. 5778, p. 72)

This objective has been, on the whole, maintained. The Antarctic, together with the areas covered by the Treaty of Tlatelolco and the Treaty of Rarotonga respectively, is today one of the world's three recognized nuclear-weapon-free zones. Even as a conflict once raged not far from its shores, and while the unjust régime of a Party to the Treaty holds sway on the tip of Africa, the Antarctic Treaty has generally attained its goals. Today, however, though not in a literal sense, the Antarctic Treaty threatens to become "an object of international discord", as countries not party to the Treaty question States Parties in this forum as to the fairness and even wisdom of present arrangements governing this vast continent.

Even among the Antarctic Treaty Parties, the conflicting claims to alleged sovereignty over various areas of Antarctica to this day still result in rancour and disagreement. This was evident in recent declarations on Antarctica, as well as objections to them, occasioned by the ratification by certain Parties of the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

There is a second reason, related to security, why Antarctica is important for all of us. The Antarctic is a vast area, covering about 10 per cent of the Earth's surface. Before the Antarctic Treaty was signed the continent was at least in theory open to colonization by fiat and to possession through diverse alleged claims. It thus became a security issue relevant to all nations.

(Mr. Ordoñez, Philippines)

The Antarctic Treaty, as it was negotiated and agreed upon at a time when most of today's United Nations Members were still not sovereign, was essentially a holding pattern and a stop-gap measure until today's more auspicious circumstances. Notably, the Antarctic Treaty in its preamble also expressed the conviction of the Parties that

"... a treaty ensuring the use of Antarctica for peaceful purposes only and the continuance of international harmony in Antarctica will further the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations". (ibid.)

A third reason has become more dominant in the course of our debate. As security has been broadened from its previously narrow military definition, the environment has come to play a bigger role in our debate. Here is where eventually we may find the strongest rationale yet for ensuring that the Antarctic is recognized as forming a crucial part of the common heritage of mankind and, accordingly, be brought more within the purview of the United Nations than has been the case.

The Antarctic is one of the last wilderness preserves of mankind. It contains 70 per cent of the world's available fresh-water resources. It is well known by now that the continent exerts a fundamental influence on the atmosphere, oceans and biological conditions of the entire global ecosystem. Any change in the Antarctic environment affects other parts of the world. For instance, the melting of the Antarctic ice sheet alone would raise the sea level, wiping out not only low-level countries but also populations in coastal areas. Were anything to disturb this equilibrium, the implications for countries such as the Philippines, an archipelago of 7,000 islands, would be at the very least terrifying.

It is significant that the discovery of an ozone hole in the atmosphere was first made over Antarctica. It reminds us of the vantage point of this polar

(Mr. Ordoñez, Philippines)

continent. Indeed, other crucial phenomena, such as global warming and global pollution, may be better observed from this continent.

Indeed, there are indications that the continent may not be as pristine as it was once before. Last year alone, there had been three cases of spills, the worst of which occurred in February 1989, when the supply vessel Bahia Paraiso ran aground two miles from the Palmer Station, off the Antarctic peninsula, polluting about 15 kilometres of Antarctic coast.

However, the principal source of pollution in Antarctica is the "day-to-day" operation of scientific research facilities. Waste disposal by stations and vessels, pollution from burning of fossil fuel, spills from vessels and storage pumps and the burning of combustible waste in open pits are among the main sources of pollution and environmental degradation in Antarctica.

At present, plant and animal life have to compete with the bases, which are located in the 2 per cent area of Antarctica that is ice-free. The number of stations has been increasing steadily. In 1983, there were only 34 stations. Today there are 57 bases operated by 20 nations, an increase of 23 bases in just six years. Since Consultative Parties are required to establish scientific stations or dispatch scientific expeditions, this would add considerably to the deterioration of the fragile environment of Antarctica.

Our efforts to awaken the international community to the importance of the issue of Antarctica over these past years have borne fruit. This has coincided with a sweeping awareness of environmental issues by peoples and nations.

We continue to regret the lack of transparency in the operations of the Antarctic Treaty, as evidenced by the failure to respond to United Nations resolutions calling for the Secretary-General or his representative to be invited to the meetings of the Consultative Parties.

(Mr. Ordoñez, Philippines)

However, we welcome the initiative undertaken by certain States Parties to the Treaty - notably Australia, France and New Zealand - to ban mining and prospecting in and around Antarctica and decisions undertaken by some countries Consultative Parties not to sign the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Minerals Resource Activities.

In this connection we support the call for the establishment of Antarctica as a nature preserve or world park, which would best guarantee against harmful human activities in this area. In our opinion, this would best be done within the context of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, scheduled to be held in Brazil in 1992.

We note that at the first substantive session of the Preparatory Committee of the Conference, held in Nairobi from 6 to 31 August this year, the international community manifested its concern over environmental degradation in Antarctica. In the working groups at that session, such items were covered as the protection of the atmosphere, conservation of biological diversity and the protection of the oceans and of all kinds of seas and coastal areas, and the protection, rational use and development of living marine resources.

It is our hope that such ideas as we have proposed here will be seriously considered by the States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty in their forthcoming review in 1991, as well as at their current session in Viña del Mar, Chile.

In a few days we will be taking action on the draft resolutions submitted on the subject of Antarctica. It is a subject of vital importance, one that certainly deserves more consideration than an expressed vote of non-participation.

We have seen what great strides have been made in recent times through the spirit of dialogue and openness. We would hope that our discussion of this item, as well as our decisions on the draft resolutions, will be marked by these attitudes.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from Russian): With regard to the question raised by the representative of Australia about possible programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.1/45/L.63/Rev.1, I have consulted the Secretariat and it is looking into the matter. It may also be necessary to hold further consultations on the text of the draft resolution. In this connection, the possibility of taking a decision on this draft resolution will depend on whether we can obtain the necessary information about the programme budget implications. The Secretariat hopes to make this information available to the Committee today or tomorrow, so when we have the information, we shall decide when to take a decision on the draft resolution on this item.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.